

Religious Leader

Lead a congregation: worship, weddings, funerals, counseling and a great deal of admin. The pay is modest and the calling is the point.

TYPICAL PAY

\$37,960

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$29k to \$73k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Congregations, places of worship, hospitals, prisons, military bases,...

How you get there

- 1 High school and involvement** Grades 9 to 12
 Nobody is ordained out of nowhere. You grow up in a community, lead youth groups, run camps and teach classes long before anyone calls it a career.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
 Any subject. Religion, history, philosophy and social work are common. Some traditions ordain without one.
- 3 Seminary or religious institute** 2 to 4 years
 A Master of Divinity is the standard three-year degree for Protestant and Jewish ordination. Catholic seminary formation runs longer. Many Muslim, Pentecostal and independent congregations use their own institutes instead.
- 4 Supervised placement** 1 to 2 years
 A year as an intern, curate, assistant or student chaplain, learning to preach, visit the sick and bury the dead under supervision.
- 5 Ordination and a first post** After the placement
 Your denomination examines and ordains you. First calls are usually small, rural, or an assistant position at a larger place.

Pros and cons

- + Work that matters to people at the hinge points of their lives
- + Real independence over how you spend most of your week
- + Housing is often provided, which stretches a modest salary
- Pay well below what the same education earns elsewhere
- You are on call for grief, always, including holidays
- Your family lives in public and gets judged with you

Good to know

The wage survey cannot really see this job

Federal statisticians file most religious staff under Religious Workers, All Other, a residual category holding about 88,400 people. Self-employed ministers and those paid partly in housing are hard to...

A minister pays both halves of the Social Security tax

For income tax a minister is usually an employee. For Social Security and Medicare the tax code treats the same person as self-employed, so they owe the employer share as well as their own. It is one of the...

Optional boosts

Hospital chaplaincy. Military chaplaincy. Prison chaplaincy. Campus ministry.

Where these numbers come from

O*NET: Religious Workers, All Other
 My Next Move: Clergy, wages and tasks
 Duke Divinity School
 USAJOBS, the federal government hiring site

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/religious-leader>



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